

How to (Mostly) Survive A Family Gathering  
By: Amanda Zimmermann

How To Survival Guide  
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The dreaded extended family gathering. People you have not spoken to in years, awkward small talk, catching up, comparisons to how successful everyone else's life is compared to your measly existence; we have all been through it. Some are more adept than others and can navigate with poise, charm, and enviable finesse. This article is not for you. This article is for the less-fortunate many who go into these events filled with a sense of dread akin to facing a pool of starved sharks (I'm sure many of us would rather face the sharks). We shall navigate this together in as close to chronological order as possible. But let us start with a list of survival gear. You will need:

- Hoodie - this is vital, you can carry all your gear in the massive pockets
- Headphones

- Phone - for listening to music/playing games/reading/contacting the outside world for help
- Charge cable for your phone - let's face it, you're going to use the crap out of it
- Caffeine - this helps with everything, trust me

Your phone will be your lifeline, your ticket to the outside world. Treasure it; you will need it for the next bit. For some, myself included, these events start with the "family road trip". Everyone piles in the car - grandma, cousins, even the dog - and the torture begins. If you were paying attention then you were smart enough to stop and grab a drink with the highest caffeine content that can legally be sold (this is an obvious exaggeration, but four shots of espresso will usually do the trick). If you are lucky (or smart), claim the sanctity of "shotgun" due to carsickness or some other ailment. Grandma spends the first fifteen trying to talk to everyone despite the fact that most passengers have already popped in headphones and drifted into their own little worlds. This is an excellent tactic for avoiding most conversation; unless you are within hitting distance as some grandmas are want to do to get your attention. Quietly suffer through her critique of your life decisions, eating habits, clothing choice by keeping your music loud enough to drown her out but low enough to know when to respond with platitudes.

Inevitably there will be an argument, most likely between parents, siblings, or parents and siblings. Someone will forget the super important [insert random item here]. There will be several minutes of only one person in the car looks for the missing item before trying to recruit help. The dog will be passed from person to

person. Finally someone will either find the missing item or declare it unimportant. There may even be few blessed moments of silence before the next bomb drops.

No one has the address. No one remembers how to get there. There are several moments of frantic panic; dad will be annoyed by the lack of planning, grandma starts pulling out her address book (is that still a thing?), while mom continues to search her phone for the “misplaced” address. Finally someone gets the address - it involves a phone call - and the GPS is up and running.

The worst time period is the limbo between arriving and eating. When you get there bolster yourself for awkward hugs and greetings, it is unavoidable. Hopefully someone has put snacks out already, if so station yourself near the food. This is a safe zone. There may be some chatter but most people are there to stuff their faces, just like you. Should people migrate to another room for talking and catching up stay by the food for as long as you can. Unavoidably someone will come looking for you and you will have to relocate; at this point your best option is to find an inconspicuous spot to sit yourself down and play on your phone. If you are mostly out of sight you can continue to avoid most conversation. In case of direct confrontation with relative, politely excuse yourself to hide in the bathroom! It is best if you can find an out-of-the-way bathroom, such as in the basement, there is less of a chance of being discovered or bothered.

Dinner is a beast unto itself. Your seating choice is vital so pay close attention. If you have remade a cousin-friend at any point in the gathering, then sitting by them is your first choice. Second choice is a toss up between parents and little cousins. Parents are ideal because you see them all the time, thus they are less

likely to ask you questions. On the other hand, they may bait you into conversations with other relatives. Side note, try to stay away from mothers and aunts; they *will compare* you to the other offspring in the family. Uncles and fathers are your best bet; unless they like to pick on you, then steer clear. Little cousins are safe because while they may jabber at you incessantly they will not ask you about your life but there is a higher chance of ending up with food on your person. Older cousins are neutral ground as they could go either way; proceed at your own risk. The safest bet to avoid conversation is to stay away from the older generations. Do not eat like a Neanderthal.

Congratulations are in order; you have made it through the worst of the socializing! Next is dessert. This is like recess. Get your sweets and retreat to a safe spot to feast upon your spoils. You deserve it. It will help to prepare you for what is next. The family photo...

There is always one elderly relative that wants family photos. Always. And where there is one camera there are always more. Hold your position, smile nicely, it will all be over soon so just make this easier on yourself. You would not want to end up showcased in [one of these beauties](#). Everyone will settle in to digest and chat, it is usually safe to disappear at this point and find a quiet place to chill. Take this time to charge up your phone and text friends to keep your sanity. The end is in sight.

Finally everyone packs up, says their goodbyes, and loads back into the car. The drive back is never as bad as the drive there; everyone is tired, full, and content. Slip your headphones on and settle in for a quiet ride. You have survived the

gathering, relatively unscathed. Maybe you even learned a little bit about yourself, grew a little. Good for you! Next time might even be easier.

### Reference

AwkwardFamilyPhotos.com. (2009, May 1). Retrieved October 20, 2014, from <http://www.awkwardfamilyphotos.com>

Melee, M. (2010). Awkward Family Photo [Digital Photo]. Retrieved from URL <http://www.flickr.com/photos/mariabird/4747116841>